

Summer Reading: The Struggles of Coming of Age



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and recreational activities for young people have been closed and cancelled. As the crisis continues into summer, camps, indoor sports facilities, gyms, and swimming pools may remain closed indefinitely in various parts of the country. Without these opportunities, and with social distancing still in place, children, adolescents, and teenagers are missing not only their friends and social activities, but also the rites of passage afforded to them by society.

However, coming of age in a chaotic world is nothing new, and The Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy has compiled a suggested reading list (and resources to support the literature) that encapsulate what this struggle can be like under trying circumstances.

The Institute selected materials on coming of age with the goal of advancing content knowledge for children. Research shows that students' reading levels – especially from fifth grade onwards – are linked to their background knowledge about specific subjects. Students who succeed on skills-based English language arts assessments do so not because they are better at “finding the main idea,” but because they are far more likely to know about the subject matter described.

We also selected materials designed to bring families together and to help encourage and facilitate conversations during these challenging times. We hope the selected books inspire young readers and serve as a helpful resource for parents, that helps motivate their children to read continuously throughout the summer.

Finally, we compiled a list of coming-of-age films to watch with children and adolescents of varying ages.

- **For all ages:** *Moana (PG)*: In Ancient Polynesia, when a terrible curse incurred by the Demigod Maui reaches Moana's island, she answers the Ocean's call to seek the Demigod to set things right. ([Where to watch this film](#))
- **For most ages:** *Akeelah and the Bee (PG)*: Every kid knows what it's like to strive for something. In Akeelah's case, it's the National Spelling Bee, making this movie a perfect combination of coming-of-age tale and underdog-competition story ([Where to watch this film](#))
- **For most ages:** *My Girl (PG)*: Tomboy Vada Sultenfuss has good reason to be morbid: her mother died giving birth to her, and her father operates funeral services out of their home. The other kids think she's a freak, and it certainly doesn't help that her best friend, Thomas J. Sennett, is a boy. To make matters worse, Vada has a crush on her English teacher, Mr. Bixler. What's an 11-year-old girl to do? ([Where to watch this film](#))
- **For adolescents and older:** *Crooklyn (PG-13)*: As her teacher mother, Carolyn (Alfre Woodard), and her jazz musician father, Woody (Delroy Lindo), worry over monthly bills, grade-schooler student Troy Carmichael (Zelda Harris) banters and bonds with her four brothers. Against her will, Troy is sent to her aunt's southern home for a summer visit, but when she returns to her bustling Brooklyn neighborhood, she learns that a family member is gravely ill. Already mature, Troy is forced to face to some very grown-up facts about life and loss. ([Where to watch this film](#)) ([List of suggestive moments parents should be aware of](#))
- **For teens to watch at the discretion of their parent:** *The Breakfast Club (R)*: Beyond being in the same class at Shermer High School, Claire Standish, Andrew Clark, John Bender, Brian Johnson and Allison Reynolds have little in common; with the exception of Claire and Andrew, they don't even associate with each other in school. In their own terms, Claire is a princess, Andrew an athlete, John a criminal, Brian a brain, and Allison a basket case. One thing they do have in common, however, is a nine-hour detention in the school library together. In this John Hughes classic film, they may come to a different opinion of themselves and the other four. ([Where to watch this film](#)) ([List of suggestive moments parents should be aware of](#))

Our reading resources are organized in two “tracks”: coming of age before the year 1900, and coming of age post-1900. We hope your family will enjoy these books and activities throughout the summer.

Narratives Depicting Life Before our Contemporary Reality (novels that take place pre-1900)

Kindergarten through Second Grade

Little House in the Big Woods
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters
Mystic Horse

Third through Fifth Grade

The Secret Garden
Anne of Green Gables
The Book of Three

Sixth through Eighth Grade

Knight Crusader
Little Women
Up From Slavery

High School

Across Five Aprils
Great Expectations
The Bondwoman's Narrative

Narratives Depicting Realities Closer to our Own (novels that take place post-1900)

Birth to Five

Bippity Bop Barbershop

Alma and How She Got her Name

Kindergarten through Second Grade

Henry Huggins + Beezus and Ramona

Abuelo

The Name Jar

Third through Fifth Grade

Al Capone Does My Shirts

Matilda

The First Rule of Punk

Sixth through Eighth Grade

Something Wicked This Way Comes

The Skin I'm In

Esperanza Rising

High School

Lord of the Flies + Damsel

The Body

The Color Purple